

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 26, 2021

8:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Chris Tuck
Representative Adam Wool
Senator Tom Begich

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 164

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to early education programs; establishing a parents as teachers program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 21

"An Act relating to the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 164

SHORT TITLE: EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) TUCK

04/07/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/07/21	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/21/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/21/21	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/23/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/23/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/23/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/26/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

BILL: SB 111

SHORT TITLE: EARLY EDUCATION; READING INTERVENTION

SPONSOR(s): EDUCATION

03/24/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/26/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/26/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/26/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/29/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/29/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/29/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/31/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
03/31/21	(S)	Heard & Held
03/31/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/07/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/07/21	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/09/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/09/21	(S)	Heard & Held
04/09/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/10/21	(S)	EDC AT 10:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/10/21	(S)	Heard & Held
04/10/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/12/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/12/21	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/14/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/14/21	(S)	Heard & Held
04/14/21	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/16/21	(S)	EDC RPT CS FORTHCOMING 2DP 2NR 1AM
04/16/21	(S)	DP: HOLLAND, STEVENS
04/16/21	(S)	NR: HUGHES, MICCICHE
04/16/21	(S)	AM: BEGICH

04/16/21 (S) EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/16/21 (S) Moved CSSB 111(EDC) Out of Committee
04/16/21 (S) MINUTE(EDC)
04/19/21 (S) EDC CS RECEIVED NEW TITLE

BILL: HB 21

SHORT TITLE: ADD FACULTY MEMBER UNIV BOARD OF REGENTS

SPONSOR(s): WOOL

02/18/21 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21 (H) EDC, STA
04/26/21 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 164.

TOM KLAAMEYER, President

National Education Association-Alaska

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 164.

KAREN MELIN, Deputy Commissioner

Department of Education and Early Development

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information and answered questions during the hearing on HB 164.

SENATOR TOM BEGICH

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information during the hearing on HB 164 on behalf of the Senate Education Standing Committee, sponsor of companion bill SB 111.

JAMIE BURGESS, Superintendent of Schools

Nome Public Schools

Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 164.

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy

Association of Alaska School Boards

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 164.

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM WOOL
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, presented HB 21.

ASHLEY CARRICK, Staff
Representative Adam Wool
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided information during the hearing on HB 21 on behalf of Representative Wool, prime sponsor.

HEATHER BATCHELDER, Chair
Faculty Alliance
University of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

SEAN BLEDSOE, Student
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

NALINAKSHA BHATTACHARYYA, Faculty
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

JULIE MAIER, PhD, President
Faculty Senate
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

MARIA WILLIAMS, Faculty
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

SANDRA WILDFEUER, President-Elect
Faculty Senate
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 21.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Story, Cronk, Gillham, Prax, Hopkins, and Drummond were present at the call to order. Representative Zulkosky arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[8:04:20 AM](#)

HB 164-EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

[Contains discussion of companion bill SB 111.]

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 164, "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to early education programs; establishing a parents as teachers program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

[Before the committee, adopted as a working document during the 4/23/21 House Education Standing Committee meeting, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 164, Version 32-LS0731\I, Klein, 4/20/21, ("Version I").]

[8:04:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TUCK, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 164. He thanked the committee and introduced the invited testimony.

[8:05:53 AM](#)

TOM KLAAMEYER, President, National Education Association-Alaska (NEA-Alaska), testified in support of HB 164. He shared that he has been a teacher for 25 years and is testifying on behalf of almost 12,000 educators across the state. He said HB 164 represents what's possible when legislators and stakeholders

work together to craft evidence-based policy that puts learning first, expressing that this is how government is supposed to work. He said HB 164 would close the achievement gap by ensuring equitable educational rigor and resources, improve the safety and well-being of students, and support all students in the goal of reading at grade-level by the end of third grade. He quoted from the Alaska Education Challenge document, which read, "Research suggests that school readiness at an early age is one critical strategy for improving future student outcomes and closing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic achievement gaps." He said that a culturally-relevant reading program, along with sound pedagogy, best practices for reading instruction, and culturally-appropriate intervention and support for students, are essential to the program.

8:11:36 AM

MR. KLAAMEYER pointed out that Alaska is one of only a handful of states that does not offer voluntary, statewide pre-kindergarten education, while states that do have such programs are often recognized as "reading successes." He characterized students in Alaska as "the most unique and diverse in the country," with 21 official languages and many cultural norms and traditions; however, 36 percent of children zero to eight years old live in poverty, Alaska has the nation's highest rate of child maltreatment, and children in Alaska are one-third more likely than their counterparts in other states to die before the age of eight. Only one-third of Alaska's children are kindergarten-ready, he said, and children from low-income families are even less likely to be equipped to start their education. He said that expanding access to voluntary, high-quality pre-kindergarten education is essential to achieving grade-appropriate reading proficiency; this education has been demonstrated to be the most effective way to increase school readiness in both academic and social-emotional skills, even as the students grow into adulthood. He said that, even though Alaska spends more per-capita on students than other states, Alaska's students don't compare to those in other states in many ways. Distance, climate, and the high cost of energy, transportation, and food make Alaska unique, and standardized testing along can't capture the comprehension of students who speak indigenous languages or who are just learning English.

MR. KLAAMEYER expressed that while tests are important, their ability to measure success is complex and varied, and students are more than just a test score. Regarding teachers, he said that after years of flat funding, inflation-related strains on

the system, and a broken retirement system, it's not surprising that there are 1,000 fewer certified teachers working in Alaska than there were only a decade ago. Legislative cuts to the system have led to many teacher layoffs, he said, and it's the same mentality about education funding that calls for the inclusion of a sunset clause in HB 164. He asked the committee to help provide enduring stability for pre-kindergarten education in the coming years, and he said students would benefit far more from ongoing program review, reporting, and engagement with stakeholders rather than sunset provisions. He expressed that the proposed legislation could be a turning point for education in Alaska.

8:18:35 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how specialized assessment would relate to standardized tests in the classroom.

MR. KLAAMEYER replied that tools like the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test, which is currently being used by almost every school district, could be incorporated into the proposed process. He said information from the MAP test goes directly to the teacher instead of having to wait until the following year for results. In addition, he said, professional development and allowing teachers the freedom to teach what they know, in the ways they know best, should provide an overall structure, resources, and support for students and educators without being so dogmatic that it becomes a hinderance to the goal.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether NEA-Alaska has consulted with teachers on the reporting requirements and the classroom time demands for the assessments.

MR. KLAAMEYER replied that a broad survey of NEA-Alaska member teachers hasn't been done, but the previous NEA-Alaska president convened a team, consisting of members throughout the state, that looked closely at the proposed policies.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked whether it would be possible to question a representative from the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED).

8:23:49 AM

KAREN MELIN, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development, asked Representative Zulkosky to clarify her question.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY pointed out that the reading intervention section of HB 164 is mandatory, while other sections are voluntary. She asked what type of support DEED would provide for teachers conducting assessments in the classroom.

MS. MELIN responded that most school districts already have an assessment process in place that includes early literacy screening. She said DEED is hoping for classroom uniformity on how the assessments are being administered, so DEED can support the entire state with a common tool, of which there are several currently being used throughout the state. The early literacy screening tools currently being used address the five main components of reading, which have been shown to be the main indicators for student success in reading. She said most classroom teachers view assessment and instruction as being "very intricately woven" into their practice, and most educators are constantly assessing students; assessment and instruction, she said, are two sides of the same coin.

[8:27:53 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that, while the goal of the proposed legislation is to establish statewide standards for pre-K, enrollment is still voluntary. Reading intervention for grades K-12 would be mandatory.

[8:28:51 AM](#)

SENATOR TOM BEGICH, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the Senate Education Standing Committee, sponsor of companion bill SB 111, stressed that, while every school district has reading programs, the proposed legislation would set a universal standard with evidence-based processes. He pointed out that not every child currently gets assessed, and the concept behind the program is to assess every child to identify struggles so the process can be retooled to work for the student.

[8:30:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the standards are developed and published, and if so, where they can be found.

SENATOR BEGICH explained that there are a number of different standards, and each school district could indicate which testing and assessment tools it's using. He expressed that

Representative Prax' question emphasizes the inconsistency throughout the state, which would be addressed by the proposed legislation.

MS. MELIN said that there are math standards and language art standards that have gone through a rigorous process to identify certain skills that all Alaska students should be able to do; those standards are published and widely supported by DEED as the knowledge a well-educated student in Alaska would have. At this point, she said, there have been some recently-adopted early childhood standards, the Early Learning Guidelines, which is published and posted on the DEED website. When it comes to setting a standard at the department, she said, there is a process; for assessment tools, however, whoever creates the assessment uses accepted standards of what a child that age should know.

[8:34:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether there exist any currently published standards.

MS. MELIN replied that there are pre-K and K-12 standards published on the DEED website.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked for the link to the published standards.

[8:36:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS commented that underperforming schools and districts already have more individual reading plans for students, and they may experience a cumulative buildup of such plans. He asked Mr. Klaameyer about any concerns about the existence of "too many" individual reading plans in a classroom, and any support necessary for the teacher to be able to handle the workload.

MR. KLAAMEYER responded that the questions of workload and class size affect the support needed to meet the needs of students. He said guidance from the school or detailed policy should make sure students' needs are met while providing support to the teachers. He discussed that local school districts should make the decisions that would best serve their students, such as making sure there aren't too many students in one class with individual reading plans, as well as limiting overall class size and providing professional development and support for teachers.

He said individual teachers should also have a voice in developing processes, since the teachers know the students.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked what specific support structures are in place.

[8:40:11 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH elaborated on three components of the proposed legislation: early education, reading, and support of the early education and reading components. The support component provides for a number of new positions within DEED that would be focused on reading, and that are designed to work directly with school districts; it also includes an integrated program for teacher training. The support component also includes reading specialists specific to local or rural communities funded by DEED, he said, and the reading specialists could be paraprofessionals drawn from the community and trained as reading specialists. He pointed out that the support system currently in place is nowhere near the level proposed in HB 164.

[8:43:20 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK interjected to acknowledge that the up-front support would be difficult in the beginning, but the early interventions should make it easier in the long run. He said when parents are involved in their child's education, it's easier for the teacher as well, so support is important.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS pointed out that previous iterations of the proposed legislation included more support than the current iteration, and he alluded to support positions "going out to school districts." He then asked whether the support person would be required to remain in the school district.

SENATOR BEGICH replied that DEED would pay for an individual already in the district, instead of one who flies in for a couple of days' work and then leaves.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked Senator Begich to clarify whether he was expressing that the level of support in HB 164 would be an increase from that which was proposed in SB 111. He also asked whether HB 164 includes funding for local paraprofessionals in school districts, and if not, how to bolster such funding.

SENATOR BEGICH responded that not all of those propositions are in HB 164. He said the reading support specialist position, as well as paraprofessional training, are no longer in the bill. He commented that he has "strong" feelings about the absence of those components. He said, "The short answer is ... it's in the bill, but nowhere near as robustly as I think it could be." He said the fiscal notes of earlier iterations of the bill were approximately 40 percent support and 60 percent early education, and the support section is now slightly declined.

[8:48:41 AM](#)

JAMIE BURGESS, Superintendent of Schools, Nome Public Schools, testified in support of HB 164 and presented an overview of early education in Nome Public Schools with a PowerPoint titled, "Pre-K and Student Achievement Impact." She presented slides 2 through 4, "Brief History," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ♣ Nome Public Schools has partnered with the two existing preschool providers from 2009-2019
- ♣ Two preschool providers -
 - ♣ Nome Preschool - private non-profit organization founded in 1970, mainly parent driven
 - ♣ Head Start - administered by local tribal non-profit organization
- ♣ These providers have the capacity to serve approximately 2/3 of the average kindergarten class each year (40 out of 60)
- ♣ The State of Alaska Preschool Grant allowed placement of certified teachers in the classrooms of the partner organizations
- ♣ The grant originally funded up to 3 teachers - two at Head Start and 1 at Nome Preschool - not consistent at filling all 3 slots with a certified teacher over 10 years
- ♣ We had 3 cycles of 3 year grants; the final cycle was a "sunset" period of decreasing funds, with a final year funded with carryovers
- ♣ During the sunset period, uncertainty of funding the grant program by the Alaska Legislature which ran well into the late spring months meant increased difficulty in hiring/retaining preschool teachers

- ♣ The last year with preschool teachers was the 2018-2019 school year
- ♣ Unable to hire any teachers in the spring of 2019 due to ongoing uncertainty around Governor's Veto of Pre-K grant funds
- ♣ Had to decline grant in the fall of 2019 - ongoing attempts to find teachers throughout the summer produced no results

MS. BURGESS presented slide 5, "Class of 2029 Kinder," which displayed a bar graph showing data of the fall administration of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment for all Nome kindergarten children in 2016. She stressed that the DIBELS assessment is nationally-recognized for determining whether children are developing foundational literacy skills, which eventually lead to reading fluency and comprehension. Two of the earliest assessments are given in kindergarten, she said; the Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) assessment ask children to identify as many letters as they can in the space of one minute, and the First Sound Fluency (FSF) assessment asks children to identify the first sound in a short, three-letter word that is read to them. The graph showed a significant difference in assessment scores between children who attended pre-K and those who did not. On slide 6, titled "Class of 2029 2nd Grade," the same children were assessed in the second grade, taking the Measure For Progress (MAP) reading assessment, another nationally-recognized assessment which compares children across the country, taking the same assessment at the same time, to each other. She said the typical benchmark for grade-level performance on the MAP assessment is approximately 40 percent; Nome elementary looks at children that fall below 25 percent as candidates for reading intervention. The slide, which displayed a bar graph of test scores of 25 percent or higher, 11 to 24 percent, and 10 percent or lower, showed that children who did not attend pre-K were much more likely to be identified as needing enrollment in the district's reading intervention program.

MS. BURGESS presented slide 7, "Class of 2031 Kinder," which displayed kindergartners' 2018 scores on the Alaska Developmental Profile, an assessment given by kindergarten teachers after four weeks of observing students' performance and scoring students on their proficiency at meeting 11 out of 13 goals such as . She said students are scored with a "2" if they consistently demonstrate the desired skill or behavior; a "1" if they sometimes demonstrate the skill; and "0" if they seldom or never demonstrate the skill or behavior. A score of "2," she

said, is needed to meet the goal, and the State of Alaska defines "kindergarten-ready" as a child receiving a score of "2" on at least 11 of the 13 goals. The slide demonstrated the scoring differences between children who did and who did not attend preschool, and also between children who attended a preschool classroom led by a teacher certified by the State of Alaska in early education. Only 17 percent of all children assessed that year met at least 11 out of the 13 goals, she said; when the group of 17 was split up according to preschool status, the group that attended preschool had higher scores than the group that did not, and the group that attended preschool with a certified teacher was the largest group.

MS. BURGESS presented slide 8, "Class of 2031 Kinder," which showed the MAP scores for the same cohort of children. The slide displayed a bar chart showing that 70 percent of the children who attended preschool scored in the 40th percentile, indicating that the children were reading close to, or at, grade level; 55 percent of the students who did not attend preschool met the same benchmark. On slide 9, "Class of 2031 Kinder," the previous slide's MAP scores were further broken out by students who attended preschool led by a certified teacher, and those who did not. In that group, she said, 75 percent of the children who met the benchmark attended preschool led by a certified teacher.

MS. BURGESS pointed out that one of the aspects of HB 164 is the requirement for a funded preschool program to be led by a high-quality teacher. She then presented slide 10, "Current Situation," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ♣ Preschool partner organizations fill teaching positions with staff of varying educational background and experience
 - ♣ None are certified Alaska Teachers
 - ♣ None hold Bachelor's Degrees in any subject; some may have some college experience
- ♣ Some hold Child Development Associate (CDA) certificates; others may be working towards completion
- ♣ Formal training on best practices in early literacy development may be lacking
- ♣ COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed any professional development collaborative opportunities between district and partner organizations

MS. BURGESS said that while the individuals do their best and may receive some training, their knowledge of best practices in early education, and especially in early literacy development, are often lacking. She said her most experienced kindergarten teacher, who has been teaching for 15 years at Nome Elementary School, said she has noticed a significant change in incoming kindergartners in 2019 and 2020, which were the last students who had the benefit of certified teachers. The teacher said she had to rethink her learning centers to meet the needs of her students. Another kindergarten teacher, who had worked in the preschool program the prior year, had some of the same children in her class; her class had the highest assessment scores. Due to a lack of teachers, she said, preschool classes were being rotated even before the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. She pointed commented that the lack of consistent preschool was demonstrated in the social and emotional learning (SEL) of the kindergartners, who needed to learn how to behave in school and interact with each other.

MS. BURGESS presented slide 11, "Conclusions," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ♣ While the data set is small, the pattern represented here is one we see repeatedly over the years:

- ♣ Students who participate in a Pre-K program are better prepared for kindergarten, score better on kinder reading assessments, and the trend continues into later grades

- ♣ When we have certified teachers in the Pre-K classrooms, the student gains are higher

- ♣ Work still needs to be done in our District to improve the ability of our early elementary teachers to be good reading teachers - we are a recipient of the State Literacy Grant with a total focus on increasing expertise in this area

MS. BURGESS expressed that HB 164 would provide a unique opportunity for stakeholders in education to have a significant impact on legislation in Alaska.

[9:01:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX, referencing slide 2, asked whether Nome Preschool went out of business.

MS. BURGESS replied that both preschools are still operating, but that Nome Preschool, as a private school, and Head Start,

administered by the local tribal non-profit, do not formally work with Nome School District.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked, "You were providing a service in addition to what Nome Preschool and Head Start was providing, is that understanding correct?"

MS. BURGESS explained that both programs were operational, but when Nome School District had the State of Alaska Preschool Grant, the school district was able to place certified teachers in the classrooms of the preschools. She said both organizations tend to hire locals who are not certified teachers and who are of limited background or knowledge in teaching best practices.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX stated his understanding that Nome School District was providing certified teachers to the Nome Preschool and Head Start programs.

MS. BURGESS replied yes. She said the positions were all funded by the grant, but because grant funding was so uncertain, finding certified teachers was difficult. She said both certified teachers had already resigned or transferred to other positions.

[9:05:23 AM](#)

SENATOR BEGICH pointed out that the goal is to ensure education grants are cross-supportive, instead of causing schools to compete with one another.

[9:06:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked whether Nome School District would apply for the three-year education grants provided under HB 164.

MS. BURGESS replied yes. She stressed that it's difficult to hire certified preschool teachers when the funding for the position from year to year is not clear.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked where Nome School District stands in performance as it relates to grant funding hierarchy.

MS. BURGESS estimated that Nome School District is likely towards the bottom of assessments. Because there is no statewide assessment for children in grades K-2, she said she assumes the school district's place in the funding hierarchy

would be based on Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) scores.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked why funding would be based on PEAKS instead of MAP.

MS. BURGESS replied that MAP could possibly replace PEAKS, and that it would be easy to access information on individual students, schools, and districts with MAP tests.

9:11:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK directed the committee's attention to the text of committee substitute (CS) of HB 164, Version LS-320731\I, Klein, 4/20/21, Section 14, subsection (c), beginning on page 9, line 2. He asked Representative Hopkins to clarify whether he was referring to a previous version of the proposed legislation in the discussion of performance ranking for grant purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked for clarification on ranking schools for the early education grant.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK deferred to Ms. Melin.

MS. MELIN explained that the early education grants are administered through an application process, separate from how individual school support needs are identified. She said the only assessment data collected statewide is on PEAKS, but several other indicators on the state accountability system are considered when assessing school performance for grants. She said there is no single assessment used statewide as an early literacy screener; she pointed out that the Nome School District uses DIBELS, while other school districts use a number of different assessment tools. She said one of the important potential results of the proposed legislation is the ability to collect consistent statewide data.

9:15:00 AM

NORM WOOTEN, Director of Advocacy, Association of Alaska School Boards, testified in support of HB 164, sharing his experience as an educator and his involvement in policy. He said HB 164 and its companion bill, SB 111, is the most important legislation he's seen in 36 years of working with the legislature on educational issues, and he expressed that it would be a "game changer" for students in Alaska. The

accountability provisions within the bill are reasonable, he said, and the strong elements for professional development would help educators meet students' needs. The assurance that early education programs are appropriate and utilize research-based strategies would prepare the students for successful educational experiences throughout the system.

MR. WOOTEN discussed the virtues of defining the elements of an evidence-based reading education system, and stressed that the ability to read well, as emphasized in HB 164, is the foundation of all future education. He pointed out that rapid and timely interventions for students in need is critical, and the emphasis on increasing parental engagement, as well as the assistance of DEED, would be helpful. He expressed that some type of hybrid instruction that includes virtual delivery will certainly continue after the COVID-19 pandemic, and professional development for the instructors will improve that learning model. The phrase "culturally responsive," he said, ensures that districts can serve students in ways acceptable to the community. He expressed disappointment that funding for universal pre-K isn't possible due to the state's fiscal cliff, but he hopes the results of the program in the proposed legislation will show the results of early education and demonstrate its importance. He expressed that he isn't opposed to the requirement to report the number of administrators compared to students, but that it's "sometimes too easy" to find additional funding merely by reducing the number of administrators, as they are the educational leaders. He said that making the repeal clauses within HB 164 consistent with one date would avoid confusion. He expressed confidence that teachers and administrators would utilize early education, evidence-based reading instruction, interventions for students not meeting proficiency, and family partnerships would make a difference in the lives of students, and that annual reports to the legislature would show improvements in standardized tests.

[9:21:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commended Mr. Wooten for his long service.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Wooten to clarify his current position.

MR. WOOTEN replied that he held the position of executive director at the Association of Alaska School Boards until last April, when he stepped down and moved into his current position.

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked Mr. Wooten about indigenous language immersion programs and any overlap in standards set out in the proposed legislation.

MR. WOOTEN stated that the Association of Alaska School Boards is in "strong support" of indigenous language instruction and recovery within school districts, including language immersion programs. He expressed that the term "culturally responsive" means that local school districts are able to address many issues with regard to customs and language programs.

[9:24:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY commented that HB 164 seems to focus on English literacy, and she asked Representative Tuck about literacy in multiple languages.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK pointed out that the bill stresses "reading literacy," and does not refer to English, specifically due to the diversity within the state. He commended Representative Kreiss-Tomkins for his efforts to support language immersion programs for native languages, pointing out that there are over 100 languages in the Anchorage School District. The best time to introduce a new language is by age 3, he said, which is part of why it's good to include the Parents As Teachers program in the proposed legislation.

[9:27:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY proposed to send questions to DEED later, in the interest of time.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 164 was held over.

HB 21-ADD FACULTY MEMBER UNIV BOARD OF REGENTS

[9:28:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 21, "An Act relating to the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

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REPRESENTATIVE ADAM WOOL, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 21, which he said would add another position to the University of Alaska (UA) Board of Regents for a

tenured faculty member, which would carry a two-year term. He said the term would be identical in length to that of a student regent, and that the additional member would provide both parity and fairness. He characterized the proposed legislation as a move that would give the faculty a voice on the Board of Regents. With regards to possible conflicts of interest, such as salary decisions, he pointed out that members may recuse themselves. He said conflicts of interest affecting a faculty member on the board could be handled the same way they've been handled for the student regents since 1976.

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ASHLEY CARRICK, Staff, Representative Adam Wool, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Wool, prime sponsor of HB 21, presented a PowerPoint titled "HB 21: UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FACULTY REGENT." She presented slide 2, "UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA BOARD OF REGENTS MEMBERSHIP," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

➤10 Regents serve 8-year terms

➤1 Student regent:

- Serves a 2-year term
- Has full board powers
- Must have 2.5 cumulative GPA
- 2 students are elected by their campus and then

a nominee is selected by the Governor

➤Current Role of Faculty with the BOR:

- Faculty Alliance makes a report at each BOR meeting
- Speaking rights

MS. CARRICK presented slide 3, "STATE BY STATE COMPARISON," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

➤16 state Universities have a student regent

➤6 state Universities have a faculty regent

➤4 state Universities have both a faculty and student regent

➤15% of private institutions also have a faculty regent

MS. CARRICK noted that when student or faculty regents are mentioned, the reference is specific to boards that include such regents as full voting members who also participate in executive session and travel with the board. She then presented slide 4, "EXAMPLES: OREGON AND PENNSYLVANIA," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

□ Oregon State University and University of Oregon:

Trustees Board has 15 members, including 11 at-large members, 1 faculty member, 1 student member, and 1 staff member all appointed by the Governor.

□ Pennsylvania State University:

Trustee Board has 38 Members, including 6 at-large members, 9 alumni-elected members, and 6 agriculture members. In addition, the Board elects 6 members- one of which is a faculty member.

MS. CARRICK presented slide 5, "EXAMPLES: FLORIDA, KENTUCKY, AND TENNESSEE," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

□ State University system of Florida:

17 members total including 14 at-large members appointed by the Governor, the Chair of the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, the Commissioner of Education, and the Chair of the Florida Student Association

□ Kentucky State University:

11 voting members, including 8 at-large members, 1 faculty and 1 staff regent elected by their respective governing councils, and 1 student regent.

□ Tennessee University System:

18 members total, including 12 at-large members, 1 faculty member, 1 student, and 4 exofficio members.

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MS. CARRICK presented slide 6, "HB 21: HOW IT WORKS," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- Increases the number of Regents from 11 to 12
- 2 nominees from the Faculty Senate of each of the three main campuses are put forward

- ☐ Governor selects one appointee
- ☐ Faculty must be tenured
- ☐ Serves a 2-year term
- ☐ Has the full powers of a regent for voting, travel, and entering executive session
- ☐ Majority vote needed for a motion of the Board to carry

MS. CARRICK presented slide 7, "BENEFITS OF A FACULTY REGENT," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

- ☐ More than a "seat at the table"
- ☐ Faculty can enter executive session, travel for Board meetings, and can vote
- ☐ Improves the ability for faculty to provide stakeholder interest
- ☐ Held to a standard of professionalism- they can recuse themselves from a conflicted vote
- ☐ Ensures that faculty, like students, are given a voting interest in University affairs

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REPRESENTATIVE ZULKOSKY asked how tie votes would be negotiated, since there would be an even number of board members.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL replied that previous iterations of HB 21 had the university president as the tie-breaker; however, he said, there was some resistance to that idea. Since a majority of votes would be needed for a measure to pass, he said, a tie vote would mean the measure failed to pass.

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CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony on HB 21.

[9:41:53 AM](#)

HEATHER BATCHELDER, Chair, Faculty Alliance, University of Alaska, testified in support of HB 21. She said Faculty Alliance feels that having the faculty voice be an active part of UA Board of Regents' discussions would be beneficial, and she expressed that the addition of a faculty member would be well-received by the accrediting agency, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). She noted concerns from legislators regarding adding a faculty position to the board,

and she said faculty members are committed to collaboration. Regarding conflict of interest issues, she said the faculty members would recuse themselves, if necessary. Regarding voting to defund programs, she said the essence of programs are the students and faculty creating the mutual cycle of teaching and learning through interactive experiences, and programs are often studied and restructured. Educators abide by a strict code of professional conduct, she said, and would abide by all policies governing the Board of Regents. She said HB 21 has been deliberated within the Faculty Senates at each campus, and they all firmly support the proposed legislation.

[9:44:58 AM](#)

SEAN BLEDSOE, Student, University of Alaska Fairbanks, testified in support of HB 21. He expressed the need for a faculty voice on the Board of Regents, and stated that he is concerned about the loss of tenured faculty and their replacement with adjunct professors.

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NALINAKSHA BHATTACHARYYA, Faculty, University of Alaska Anchorage, testified in support of HB 21. He discussed educators' deep respect for knowledge, and said that by excluding tenured faculty from the Board of Regents, the members are getting every perspective except for that of an academic. He said the business of a university is threefold: production of knowledge (research), distribution of knowledge (teaching), and service. He expressed that it is always faculty "on the chopping block" when considering budget issues, and he noted that only 20 percent of the budget goes to faculty. He said the Board of Regents would benefit from having a faculty member.

[9:50:42 AM](#)

JULIE MAIER, PhD, President, Faculty Senate, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), testified in support of HB 21. She informed the committee that the UAF Faculty Senate passed a resolution fully supporting HB 21, stating that faculty and students are the "core" of the university, so having a faculty member on the Board of Regents is imperative. She said the lack of a faculty voice and perspective on the Board of Regents has been damaging to the university, resulting in ill-informed decisions, particularly in recent years. The current structure of the board, she said, allows a single faculty member seven minutes at the beginning of the meeting to present a report; no

faculty member is allowed to speak again unless questioned. When the board is presented with questionable information and faulty data, she said, the faculty member is not allowed to speak; when discussing dismantling a crucial program, she said, no academic experts are allowed to speak. She characterized these exclusions as a "huge disconnect" from the reality of a university, and she said they damage the ability of a university to lead the way into the future. A board in any other industry, she said, would have members who are full-time professionals in that industry, which ensures a deep and thorough understanding of the matter overseen by the board.

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MARIA WILLIAMS, Faculty, University of Alaska Anchorage, testified in support of HB 21. She said she has been teaching at University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) for 10 years, and that most of her family has attended the university. She characterized the Board of Regents as "fastidious" about conflicts of interest. She said faculty comprises approximately 18 percent of the budget, including salaries and benefits, and she expressed agreement with Dr. Maier's assessment that the Board of Regents has made damaging decisions due to its disconnect from the faculty and curriculum.

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SANDRA WILDFEUER, President-Elect, Faculty Senate, University of Alaska Fairbanks, testified in support of HB 21. She expressed having observed many occasions on which a faculty position on the Board of Regents would have been beneficial.

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CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 21.

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REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked whether any current Board of Regents members have expressed an opinion on the proposed legislation.

REPRESENTATIVE WOOL stated that no current regents have expressed an opinion. He said the issue of exclusion of a faculty member on the Board of Regents has been in discussion for some time, and that the issue of the possibility of a conflict of interest has arisen many times. He said, "I just

said, 'I don't really think this conflict of interest thing really holds water. You have a student on there. If you didn't have a student on there, then you could maybe legitimately say ... but why do you bring a student regent on? Because you want the student's perspective.'" He said the university is filled with students with the goal of education and graduation, so it's important to have the voice of a student on the board; however, he said, faculty is needed to educate and graduate students, so you need that voice as well. He pointed out that any hospital board is not only accountants and business owners; there will always be doctors on the board.

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CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 21 was held over.

[10:02:53 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.